

R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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USING TELEVISION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF URBAN LIFE--A PROJECT
SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION.

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TELEVISION

IN CONNECTION WITH ITS CONCERN WITH THE IMPROVEMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN LARGE URBAN AREAS, THE NATIONAL
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION SPONSORED A PROJECT TO ANSWER THESE
QUESTIONS--(1) CAN TELEVISION CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOLUTION OF
PROBLEMS FACING URBAN COMMUNITIES, (2) CAN IT BE USED TO
BRING ABOUT LOCAL ACTION ON THESE PROBLEMS, (3) HOW CAN IT
SERVE AS A VEHICLE FOR BOTH ADULT EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT, (4) WHAT IS THE ROLE OF LOCAL EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP REGARDING THE USE OF TELEVISION TO SOLVE COMMUNITY
PROBLEMS, AND (5) WHAT ISSUES ARISE WHEN A COMMUNITY SETS OUT
TO USE TELEVISION FOR THIS PURPOSE. (MS)

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USING TELEVISION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF URBAN LIFE:
A PROJECT SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

- . . . Can television make a contribution to the understanding and solution of some of the crucial problems facing urban communities?
- . . . Can it be used to bring about local action on these problems?
- . . . How can it effectively serve as a vehicle for both adult education and community betterment?
- . . . What is the role of local educational leadership with respect to the use of television to help solve different kinds of community problems?
- . . . What are the significant issues and problems which are encountered when a community sets out to use television for this purpose?

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In an attempt to answer these questions, the National Education Association has this year launched a project designed to give insight and encouragement to communities who are desirous of enlisting the rich resources of the television medium in helping adults in large urban centers of our nation to understand and cope with the myriad of problems they face. The project is sponsored jointly by the Divisions of Audiovisual Instructional Service and Adult Education Service, NEA, and ties into NEA's central concern for 1962-63 -- the improvement of educational services in large urban areas.

To be sure, this is a "brave new world" for educational television! Up to now, educators have been somewhat preoccupied with the use of television for in-school instruction. With the possible exception of some of the programs produced by NET, educators have relatively overlooked the use of television in its broader context -- that of serving as an effective education tool for the entire community. As one member of the FCC staff said recently in an address to educational broadcasters, "If you do not use your educational outlets to do more than in-school telecasting for children you will be guilty of narrow-casting,

and not broadcasting! Thus, there has risen a distinction in educational broadcasting between ETV and ITV (Instructional Television), the latter referring to in-school telecasting and the former to general educational programs for all ages. While the NEA project is concerned with using both commercial and non-commercial (educational) channels for this purpose, realistically we recognize that commercial stations, because of their base of operations, are not in a position to undertake extensive programming in this area. This is a community education function which properly falls in the sphere of the educational television station. In fact, in its earlier days ETV was known as "community television." Similarly, the Superintendent of Schools has often been called the Superintendent of Community Education because he is invested with the responsibility for the education of adults and out-of-school youth, as well as children in school. More and more schools are recognizing their responsibility to the continuing education of adults wherein education is viewed as a life-long process. NEA's concern is stimulating action at the local level -- getting communities to do their own programming, rather than giving them a package job similar to that used in 50 other urban areas. The components of the problem, as identified by the project steering committee, are four in number: television, urban life, adults, the relationship of educational process to community action. The problem is at the point where these four components intersect. The boundaries might be described thusly:

Components

1. Television

2. Urban life and problems

Boundaries

Stress informal uses.
Emphasize utilization by community.
Making TV an activator--not a presenter.
Using TV as a stimulus for discussion groups.

Motivation for local initiative in the solution or resolution of key problems.

Components

3. Adults

Boundaries

All community groups (culturally deprived as well as leadership potential). Aimed at majority of community--the great milieu of citizenry.

4. Relationship of educational process to community action.

How to bring about change.

The problem is at the point where the four components intersect.

In short, the problem might be stated this way: "How to use television to bring about action on community problems." It goes without saying that such programs must be tailored to meet local needs.

Procedures Used

When the project started last Spring--the Steering Committee, consisting of staff members of both divisions sponsoring the project plus an additional five others, felt their first step should be that of gaining insight for the staff itself--a series of in-service experiences which would increase our own insights into the problems. In other words, before staff could advocate that communities throughout the nation undertake programming of this type, it should first understand fully the dimensions of the problems involved. In turn, the information and insight gained could be made available later to guide communities as they undertake their own programming. To gain insight, the following procedures were undertaken:

1. Taped interviews were held with outstanding communicators, urban experts, administrators of educational organizations, and educational broadcasters, to tap the wealth of information they had as to the possibilities and concerns in using television for community action, rather than for entertainment. The information gleaned from these transcribed interviews was put into a document for study by the Steering Committee. The interviews were open-ended in nature and dealt with such topics as these:

- road blocks which stand in the way and how to overcome them
- how to get people to watch
- how to bring about change in a community
- hunches the interviewee might have
- predictions he might want to make
- how to get public sanction for using TV this way

2. On the basis of these interviews, the Steering Committee members formulated certain guidelines and hypotheses which seemed applicable to several situations. These needed to be verified and tested against several television action-oriented programs now underway.
3. Consequently, about a month ago the Steering Committee met with the directors of four of the most outstanding projects now in operation-- Operation Alphabet (Philadelphia); Focal Point, Baltimore; Metroplex Assembly (St. Louis); and Leadership Seminar (Boston). To this meeting the NEA invited four of the nation's leading communications and urban life authorities to serve as a jury quizzing the project directors in depth as to the successes and failures of their TV series and reasons for same.
4. The Steering Committee and staff are now pulling together the interviews testing their principles and hypotheses against the information gained at the meeting to see if they are valid before passing them on to others about to enter this important programming area.
5. Among the next steps in the project include the publication of a resource guide for communities and the holding of a national conference for representatives of large urban areas interested in doing programs of this nature.

Some Current Action-Oriented Community TV Projects Underway

Operation Alphabet: This series needs no introduction to adult educators. It is sponsored by NAPSAE and is designed to deal with illiteracy which now has become a national problem. Inability to read or write well keeps countless members of adults on dependency, on relief. TV seems to be an ideal medium to enlist in this national massive effort. 90% of U. S. homes have TV receivers, and even in the economically-deprived areas of our nation the average rarely drops below 70%. The adult who conscientiously follows OPERATION ALPHABET throughout the 100 lessons on TV, acquires a basic third-grade education and gains enough self confidence to enroll in public school adult education classes.

Focal Point, Baltimore: A Continuing Conference on Community Progress

A unique leadership training technique embracing an all-day leadership conference, a series of 26 TV programs, and neighborhood viewing groups who watch the programs weekly, discuss the content of the programs, and react. Each program presented a critical examination of a metropolitan area problem with specific recommendations for action. Problems included mass transportation, urban renewal, highways, airport, and the port of Baltimore. Citizens who were to participate as viewers were asked to attend an initial one-day leadership conference as a kick-off, then watch the programs regularly, and act on the basis of the information they had obtained. The purpose was to get action on metropolitan problems.

Metroplex Assembly -- St. Louis: A new kind of "Town Meeting" via tele-

vision for people concerned with community life. It links together hundreds of informal discussion groups around the metropolitan St. Louis area. Two series are conducted per year. Each session comprises three phases: the television phase (from 8 to 8:30) during which the question of the evening is raised and basic facts presented and weighed; the Viewing Post phase, (8:30 to 9:30), during which the neighborhood discussion

Metroplex Assembly (cont'd)

groups go into action discussing the problem raised; a second television phase (9:30-10:00), during which the experts return to speak on questions and comments from Viewing Posts, and to share how people are feeling about the question in different parts of town. The topics range from the migrant to St. Louis to current affairs.

Leadership Training Project (Boston) -- A ten-week series of programs

dealing with Leadership Training. The ultimate aim was to improve the quality of leadership in voluntary community organizations. It was believed this could be achieved through group discussion and demonstration using television as the primary resource. About 400 study groups were formed in nearly 200 communities extending throughout the New England states. The purpose of the project has been listed as follows: "The LT Project was a pilot project to determine if training for leadership could be effective with television and group study substituted for the customary trainer. Because the training needs across the country far exceed the number of trainers available and because many organizations have neither the money nor the accessibility to training consultants to make wide-scale training feasible, on a person-to-person basis, mass media seemed the only reasonable solution." ETV has worked until now chiefly with content and with skill training. Could attitudes and sensitivity be developed directly through TV?

Final comment: "It worked!"

Some Problems Identified with Which TV Can Help

- lack of adequate communication
- need for mass transportation
- migrants who move into the city from rural areas in search of jobs
- automation and technological unemployment
- problems of aging and education for retirement
- slums and urban renewal

Some Tentative Hypotheses and Guidelines

On the basis of the data we have thus far been able to gather, the evidence is strong to support the idea that TV has a definite role and contribution to make both in the formal and in the informal education of adults.

The Steering Committee is agreed that certain guidelines and hypotheses seem to stand out as being important. A few of these follow:

1. That active community participation is essential in the solution of urban problems. This means that a community must do a great deal of background work in advance of the airing of the program and that the TV series must grow out of needs which citizens identify as being important to them.
2. That communication alone is not enough to produce effective community action on complex problems. Participation in viewing groups with commitment to study and action are vital, if change is to occur and concerted action is to result.

We need to tie in the viewing of programs with some kind of group activity.

3. Opportunity must be provided for viewing groups to do something about the problem. They must be presented with alternatives for action. They must be helped to see what an individual citizen can do about the problem.
4. What is programmed should do something which is directly related to the problems which people have and are conscious of every day. Instead, for example, of announcing that there will be a presentation on the transit problems of New York, it is far better to ask a question such as, "Do you hang on a strap in the morning? Do you worry whether the bottleneck will make you late for work?"

5. An ETV program has a greater chance of motivating action if it uses a role model -- a well-known figure of importance who has "made the grade." For example, a person who understands very well "the problem because he has faced the problem himself and conquered it."
6. Educational television has a greater chance of motivating action if a motive is created to do something following the program.
7. The TV media, if it is to bring about change, must be supplemented, complemented and reinforced by other methods and materials. It cannot bring about change by itself.
8. Educational television has a greater chance of motivating action if it avoids topics where opinion is already fixed. TV is best at creating new ideas and opinions.

As a result of our meetings several things stand out:

1. It is apparent that there has been a lack of communication between communities and between educational leaders in the field about on-going programs and successes and failures of each.
2. At present, the only device we have for measuring success or failure is audience participation and reaction, which in most cases is measured strictly in numbers of responses. This reaction is not indicative of any follow-up action or change, although it does indicate a degree of acceptance or rejection on the part of those participating.
3. Programs which are designed to bring about change should inform and not indoctrinate. Decisions should reflect the creative action of many rather than the manipulation for endorsement of decisions made by a few.

One major hypothesis the planning committee has identified is this:

Although some problems that are common to urban communities are actually national in scope, it is important to attack them on the local level -- especially in the beginning. That is, local programing on the aspects having local implications, or on problems that seem peculiar to an area, seems most likely to promise

success. Another hypothesis is that communication alone is not enough to produce effective action on complex matters. It is essential that TV viewers find some way to use the televised information -- either for their own self-improvement or for their community's benefit. "If you don't use it, you lose it."

The televised program should be open-ended so as to require something of the viewers and to commit them to the belief that what they do will help. It should start discussions which clarify and support the issues at hand. Television can arouse interest, but inter-personal communication usually determines whether the improvement or change will be adopted. If the ETV program is coupled with appeals to groups and is tied in with definite group activity, if it prescribes a promising mode of action and offers volunteers the opportunity to join in, it will have a greater chance of motivating successful action. Wide-spread participation in the community, whether through neighborhood viewing groups, or organizational follow-up, or through both, will probably spell the difference between success and failure of the project.

Again, television is not the total answer or panacea for complex community problems, but it is one step along the road. It can be the spark that is needed for the community to look at itself and its problems, and to set in motion a chain of action which might transform it from the nightmare it so often is into the kind of city any one of us would like to live in.